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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF PROBATION
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Youth At Risk: Juveniles On Probation In Massachusetts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Extensive analysis of young offenders placed on probation in 1989 in Massachusetts provides some heartening but a great deal of worrisome news. While the number of youth appearing before the courts has dropped during the 1980's, those coming to the attention of the courts present a profile that is more alarming than ever, providing a more serious challenge to the juvenile justice system.

THE GOOD NEWS

- * The number of juveniles entering the system in 1989 shows an 18% decrease from the 1979 totals

THE BAD NEWS

- * The proportion of youth placed on probation for drug offenses is at the highest point in the decade and this increase has been experienced statewide
- * During the first six months of 1989, the percentage of juvenile offenders involved with cocaine/crack has more than doubled statewide from the figures for 1987/88, while there has been a corresponding drop in involvement with marijuana
- * Nearly one-fifth of the 1989 group appeared before the juvenile court for violent offenses-- the highest percentage in the decade and nearly a 50% increase from the 1980 cohort
- * The proportion of youth using weapons has increased significantly in the last two years, with dramatic jumps recorded in the major inner city areas

In addition, the study found that the great majority of the juvenile probationers in 1989 are experiencing simultaneous major dysfunction in the three customary areas of personal support - family, school, and peer group - leaving them without the essential foundations for healthy development.

Those youth experiencing the worst personal and social problems typically entered the juvenile system for the first time at an especially young age (14 years old or under at the time of their first arrest).

These alarming trends demand a rethinking of existing approaches for intervening with juvenile offenders as well as the development of innovative programs directed at the changing face of juvenile crime.

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

THE GOOD NEWS. The good news is that there are actually fewer juveniles coming into the juvenile justice system. During the past decade, the number of juveniles entering the juvenile justice system has decreased by 18.1% (22,552 juvenile arraignments in 1979 versus a projection of 18,468 in 1989).

THE BAD NEWS. The bad news is that **even with this decrease, the seriousness of the offenses committed by juveniles has clearly increased** as we end the decade of the 80's. Table 1 below provides a profile of the 1,586 juveniles placed on probation between January and June of 1989.

TABLE 1: 1989 MASSACHUSETTS JUVENILE PROBATION POPULATION

PRIOR RECORD

* 35.2% had a previous court appearance within the past five years.

PRIOR PROBATION

* 26.7% had previously been placed on probation during the past five years.

**14 OR YOUNGER
AT FIRST OFFENSE**

* Almost half (49.7%) had committed their first offense by the time they were 14.

These youth were more likely to have recidivated, to be educationally handicapped, and to have unsupportive family and social relationships than the youth who committed their first offense when older.

**ALCOHOL/DRUG
PROBLEM**

* At least 42.6% have a substance abuse problem.

**HOME DISCIPLINE
PROBLEM**

* 67.5% are serious discipline problems at home.

**SCHOOL DISCIPLINE
PROBLEM**

* 73.7% have caused major disciplinary problems at school.

**PEER RELATIONS
PROBLEM**

* 66% of these juvenile probationers have negative peer support.

RESIDENCE CHANGE

* 11.1% had two or more residence changes during the past year.

When compared to those who had residential stability, these youth: were more likely to have recidivated; to have entered the juvenile justice system at an early age (14 or younger); to have a substance abuse problem; to have serious discipline problems both at home and at school, and to have relationship problems with both their families and peers.

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

PRESENT vs. PAST PATTERNS OF DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR. The delinquent behavior that has emerged during the first six months of 1989 is alarming, especially when compared with that of juveniles from throughout the 1980's.

Despite the decline in juvenile arraignments, if present trends continue, 1989 will be a watershed period for juveniles before the court. During the first six months of 1989, the proportion of juveniles placed on probation for controlled substance offenses was higher than at any time during the past ten years; the percentage involved with cocaine/crack more than doubled in one year; the proportion of those committing crimes against the person was higher than at any time during the past 10 years, and the percentage of juvenile weapons offenders on probation was higher than at any time during the past decade.

If we look at Table 2 on the following page, the offense distribution of the current juvenile probation population is compared to that of the juvenile probation population from a year or so ago. Column A shows the offense distribution for the 2,117 juveniles placed on probation between July, 1987

and the end of February, 1988. Column B shows the offense distribution for those placed on probation during the first six months of 1989.

TABLE 2: OFFENSE DISTRIBUTION - JUVENILE PROBATIONERS

	COLUMN A	COLUMN B
	1987/88 (N=2,117)	1989 (N=1,586)
CRIMES AGAINST THE PERSON	15.0%	19.3%
CRIMES AGAINST PROPERTY	54.6	50.0
CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE CRIMES	7.4	8.8
MOTOR VEHICLE CRIMES	12.2	10.1
OTHER	10.8	11.9

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

On the surface, there may not seem to be significant changes in the offense distribution. The proportion of juveniles placed on probation for controlled substance offenses only increased by 1.4%. Those placed on probation for crimes against the person increased proportionately by just 4.3%.

However, when the analyses go beyond broad offense categories, substantial changes in delinquent activity do appear. An investigation of the specific types of delinquent activity reveals several disturbing facts. First, during the first six months of 1989, proportionately more youth from urban, suburban, and rural communities throughout Massachusetts were placed on probation for having committed controlled substance offenses than in any of the preceding ten years (cf. Table 3 on the following page).

TABLE 3: JUVENILES ON PROBATION - CRIME TYPE BY YEAR

	PERSON OFFENSE	PROPERTY OFFENSE	CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE OFFENSE	MAJOR MOTOR VEHICLE OFFENSE.
1980	13.7%	49.6%	5.6%	8.4%
1981	12.2	53.7	6.7	6.2
1983	12.7	62.9	6.7	7.4
1984	17.7	56.4	7.2	8.9
87/88	15.0	54.6	7.4	12.2
1989	19.3	50.0	8.8	10.1

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

During the 1980's, nearly 75% of the juveniles placed on probation for controlled substance offenses were associated with marijuana, only a relatively small proportion (8 - 12%) were involved with cocaine/crack. However, within the first six months of 1989, those associated with **cocaine/crack more than doubled from the previous year** to an all-time high of 28.3%, with a corresponding sharp drop in the proportion of those involved with marijuana (cf. Figure 1 on the next page). This is alarming in light of the fact that crack/cocaine is a more addictive substance, and reports indicate that a person's behavior is more erratic while under the influence of cocaine/crack.

Secondly, the increase in the number of juveniles who commit crimes against the person is also alarming. Table 3 above clearly shows that the percentage of youth placed on probation for crimes against the person is now higher than at any time during the preceding ten years. **Proportionately more youth have been placed on probation during the first six months of 1989 for having committed crimes against the person than at any other time during the past decade**, and 23.4% of the crimes against persons included the use of a weapon.

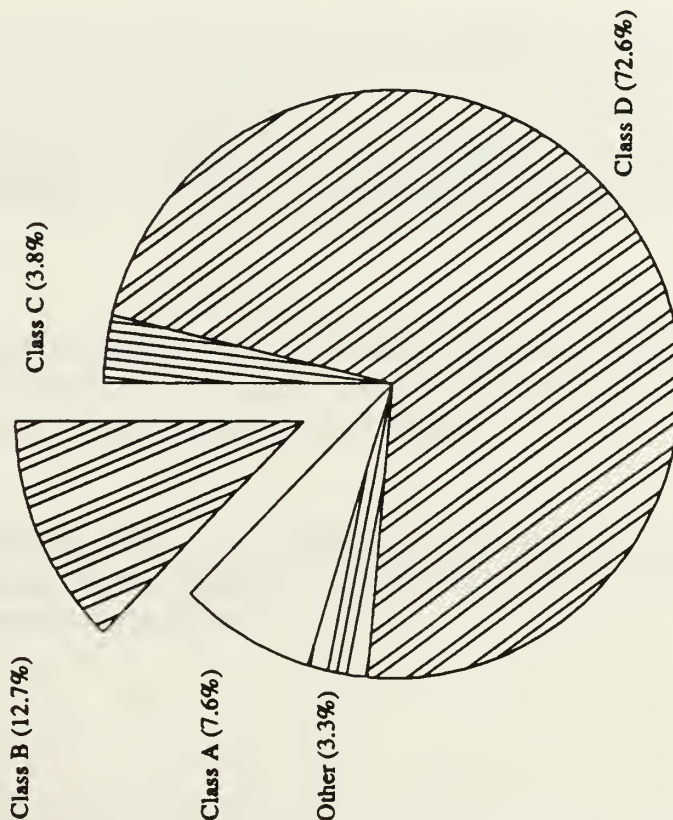
Further analysis indicates that weapons use in general is growing quickly among the juvenile probation population, especially in the cities. The number of youth placed on probation for weapons offenses during the first six months of 1989 (N = 149) increased by 16.3% from 1987/88 (N = 130).

This increase in weapons charges becomes even more significant when comparing the 1978 - 1988 time period, when a stable rate of 5 - 6% of the juvenile probation population were charged with weapons offenses.

Figure 1: Controlled Substance Offenders 1987/88 - 1989

**Controlled Substance Offenders
1987/88**

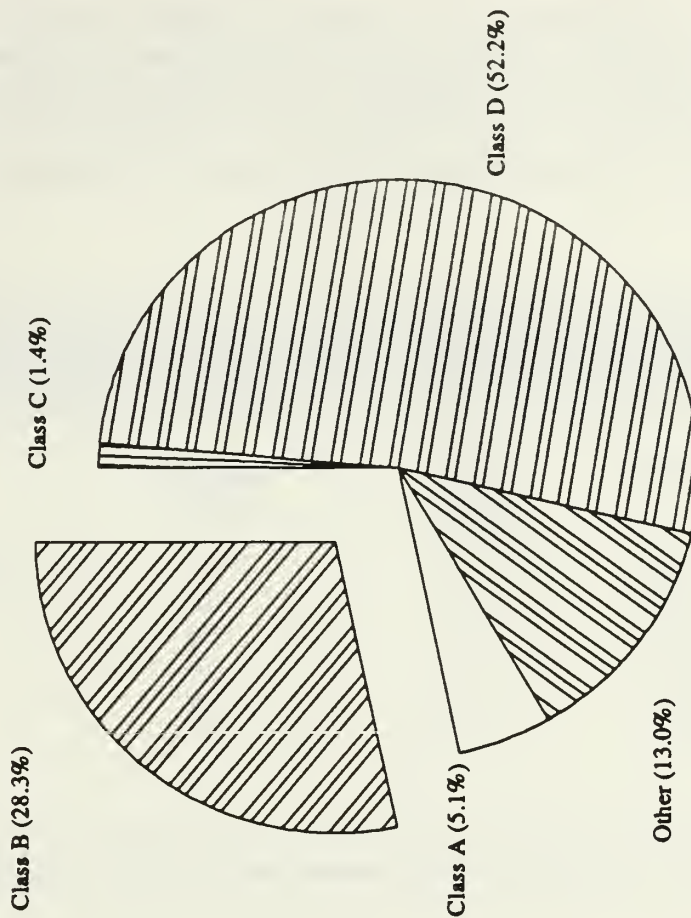
(N= 157)



Class A: Typically Heroin
Class C: Typically Hallucinogens & Depressants
Class E: Typically Codeine, Morphine, Valium

**Controlled Substance Offenders
1989**

(N= 138)



Class B: Typically Cocaine/Crack
Class D: Typically Marijuana
Other: Possession of drug paraphernalia

Additional analysis shows that, unlike the drug cases, this sudden increase in weapons offenses among juveniles on probation is largely an urban phenomenon (cf. Table 4 below). If we isolate six busy urban courts (Boston, Dorchester, Roxbury, Lawrence, Springfield, and New Bedford Juvenile Courts), we see that there has been a 137% increase in the number of juvenile weapons offenders in these courts. It should be noted that 3 of the 6 courts are in the City of Boston (Boston Juvenile, Dorchester, and Roxbury).

TABLE 4: JUVENILE WEAPONS OFFENDERS BY COURT

	1987/1988 (N=35)	1989 (N=83)	% CHANGE
BOSTON JUVENILE	7	23	229%
DORCHESTER	0	8	800%
ROXBURY	10	15	50%
LAWRENCE	0	4	400%
SPRINGFIELD	10	19	90%
NEW BEDFORD	8	14	75%

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

Analysis shows that youth who enter the system at a young age and who stay involved in the system rapidly become even more disadvantaged. Table 5 on the following page separates the older juvenile offender (those 15 or over) into two groups. The first group consists of those who are currently 15 or over, but who committed their first offense when they were 14 or younger. The second group consists of those who are currently 15 or older and who committed their first offense when they were 15 or older.

This comparative analysis clearly shows that those delinquents who first entered the juvenile justice system at age 14 or younger and continue to commit delinquent acts differ significantly on almost every Risk/Need indicator from those who entered at a later age.

For example, 81% have a prior record. Over 56% of such youth are substance abusers. Over 7-out-of-every-10 are educationally dysfunctional. Nearly 60% lack basic family relationship skills, and 73% have serious social relationship problems.

TABLE 5: OLDER OFFENDERS AT AGE OF FIRST OFFENSE

		14 OR YOUNGER (N=279)	15 OR OLDER (N=773)
RISK CHARACTERISTICS			
PRIOR RECORD	*	81.0%	25.9%
SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PROBLEM	*	79.1	71.7
HOME DISCIPLINE PROBLEM	*	74.9	65.4
PEER RELATIONS PROBLEM	*	76.0	64.6
ALCOHOL/DRUG PROBLEM		56.2	51.4
2 + RESIDENCES	*	16.1	9.5
NEEDS CHARACTERISTICS			
EDUCATIONAL SKILLS PROBLEM	*	70.1	59.0
FAMILY RELATIONS PROBLEM	*	59.5	39.5
SOCIAL RELATIONS PROBLEM	*	73.0	58.5
ALCOHOL ABUSE PROBLEM		29.9	34.4
DRUG ABUSE PROBLEM		34.3	29.2
BEHAVIOR PROBLEM	*	58.8	44.1
PROBATION SUPERVISION			
AVERAGE LENGTH	*	11.1 months	10.2 months
LEVELS			
MAXIMUM	*	73.4%	33.2%
MODERATE	*	23.0	43.4
MINIMUM	*	3.6	23.4

* Significant at .05

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

Table 6 below presents another analysis of the juveniles who entered or reentered the juvenile probation system in 1989. It distinguishes between those who already had a prior court record and those who were new to the system.

Over 80% of the youth who have previously been before the court are serious disciplinary problems in their schools. Close to 74% are uncontrollable at home. Over 1/2 have a substance abuse problem. Nearly 3/4ths have negative peer relationships. In short, as the problems these youth confront continue and/or grow worse, they become more entrenched in delinquent behavior, and consequently they pose a greater degree of threat to the community.

TABLE 6: JUVENILES WITH/WITHOUT A PRIOR COURT APPEARANCE			
		ONE/MORE PRIORS (N=557)	NO PRIORS (N=1,027)
RISK CHARACTERISTICS			
SCHOOL DISCIPLINE PROBLEM	*	80.2	70.2
HOME DISCIPLINE PROBLEM	*	73.7	64.2
ALCOHOL/DRUG PROBLEM	*	52.3	37.3
PEER RELATIONS PROBLEM	*	74.0	61.7
2 + RESIDENCES	*	15.4	8.8
NEEDS CHARACTERISTICS			
EDUCATIONAL SKILLS PROBLEM	*	68.7	56.8
FAMILY RELATIONS PROBLEM	*	55.1	39.8
ALCOHOL ABUSE PROBLEM	*	31.6	22.7
DRUG ABUSE PROBLEM	*	33.5	20.3
BEHAVIOR PROBLEM	*	60.4	43.4
PROBATION SUPERVISION			
AVERAGE LENGTH	*	11.1 months	10.7 months
LEVELS			
MAXIMUM	*	68.8%	27.6%
MODERATE	*	29.2	43.5
MINIMUM	*	2.2	28.9

* Significant at .05

Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989

JUVENILES ON PROBATION: SOCIALLY DAMAGED YOUTH

Juvenile offenders in Massachusetts are confronted by a host of problems; problems which threaten them, isolate them and give them little hope. Such youth are not just from the "inner city". They come from suburban and rural Massachusetts as well. They live in troubled and stressful homes. They exist with little or no positive social support. They are limited as to where they can go for advice or for help. They generally establish negative peer relationships. They appear to be cut off from and disinterested in school. They are seriously deficient in educational skills. They abuse alcohol and/or controlled substances.

These are the youth who generally commit crime and who are placed on probation - socially damaged youth who have a high level of service needs. As long as these youth remain so vulnerable, as long as their needs are unattended to, they are likely to become ever more firmly entrenched in delinquent behavior.

SUBSTANCE ABUSERS. Substance abuse, for example, is a **common problem** among the juvenile probation population, and this problem is **getting worse**.

Measuring the degree of substance abuse among young people has always been difficult, for a number of reasons. For example, it is not unusual for adolescents to manifest periods of erratic behavior. Many of the behavioral signs that serve as possible indicators of substance abuse could therefore also be easily misinterpreted as just another sign of unpredictable adolescent behavior. Or again, because of their youth, and because of the relatively short time that they have been substance abusers, they may not manifest the physiological signs that frequently go with long term substance abuse.

Nevertheless, **initial** interviews with juveniles assigned to probation indicated that in 1987/88 **at least** 36.6% of the general juvenile probation population were substance abusers. By the first six months of 1989, this figure had grown to **at least** 42.6% of the general juvenile probation population.

While this proportional increase of 6% is statistically significant and occurred in less than a year-and-a-half, it is important to remember that these figures **still probably underestimate** the actual number of youngsters on probation who have a substance abuse problem, for several reasons.

First, these figures are based on initial interviews with probation officers. Data gathered subsequent to the initial probation interview indicates that the percentage of youth on probation who have

a substance abuse problem is considerably higher.

Second, average figures frequently mask significance. While 42.6% of the general probation population have been identified as substance abusers, over 50% of those who are 15 or older have been identified as substance abusers.

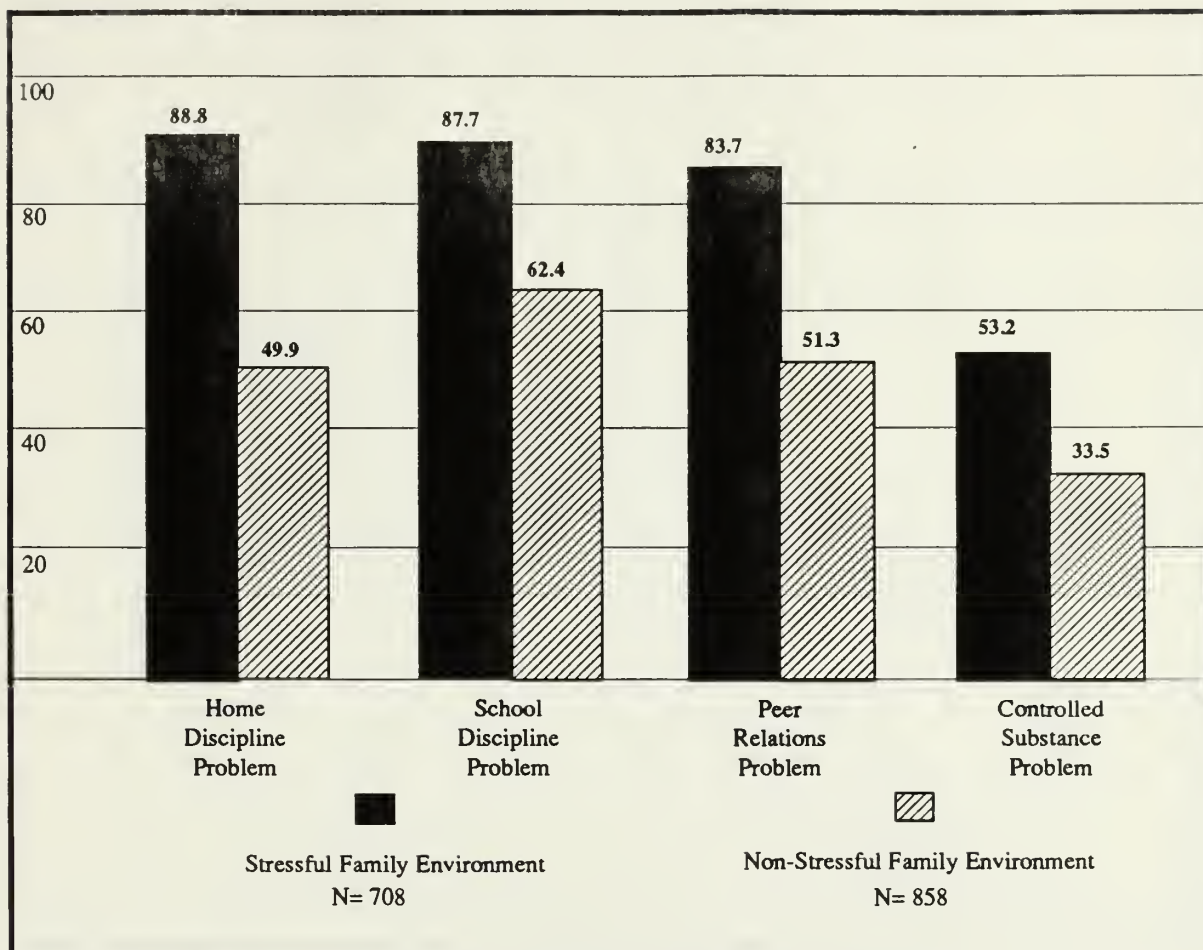
Finally, **in the past year-and-a-half, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of youth on probation who are associated with cocaine/crack, and a corresponding significant decrease in the number of youth associated with marijuana** (cf. Figure 1 on page 5). While marijuana, at least now, still appears to be the most common controlled substance among these youth, the large increase of those associated with cocaine/crack suggests that the juvenile probation population is becoming more susceptible to highly addictive substances. If this continues, by the end of 1989 there will be approximately 1,525 juveniles on probation with a serious substance abuse problem, and at least 432 of these will be associated with cocaine/crack. Since these substances are so highly addictive, their use may very well create new compulsions among the juvenile probation population which, in turn, could seriously impact the types of crimes committed by these youth and the degree of threat they pose to the community.

SOCIAL INDICATORS. The literature on childhood and adolescent development emphasizes that a youth's normal, healthy development requires consistent nurturing, continual positive feedback, and unambiguous structural support. These ordinarily come from three sources - the family, peers, and school.

The disturbing reality for the great majority of juvenile offenders in Massachusetts, though, is that they seem to get little of the necessary nurturance from any source. At home, they are usually in trouble, labelled as a "discipline" problem; living in an environment where there are either no clear guidelines or where they are in frequent conflict with their parent(s). Most have few friends, and if they do, they are generally a negative influence. And the majority seem apathetic toward school where, if they do attend, they are once again seen as a "discipline" problem.

Each of these problems by themselves are difficult for a youth to bear. Analyses indicate, however, that these juveniles typically experience all three of these unhealthy situations simultaneously. Since each of these factors by itself has a serious impact, their cumulative negative influence is even more devastating.

Figure 2: Impact of Stressful Family Environment

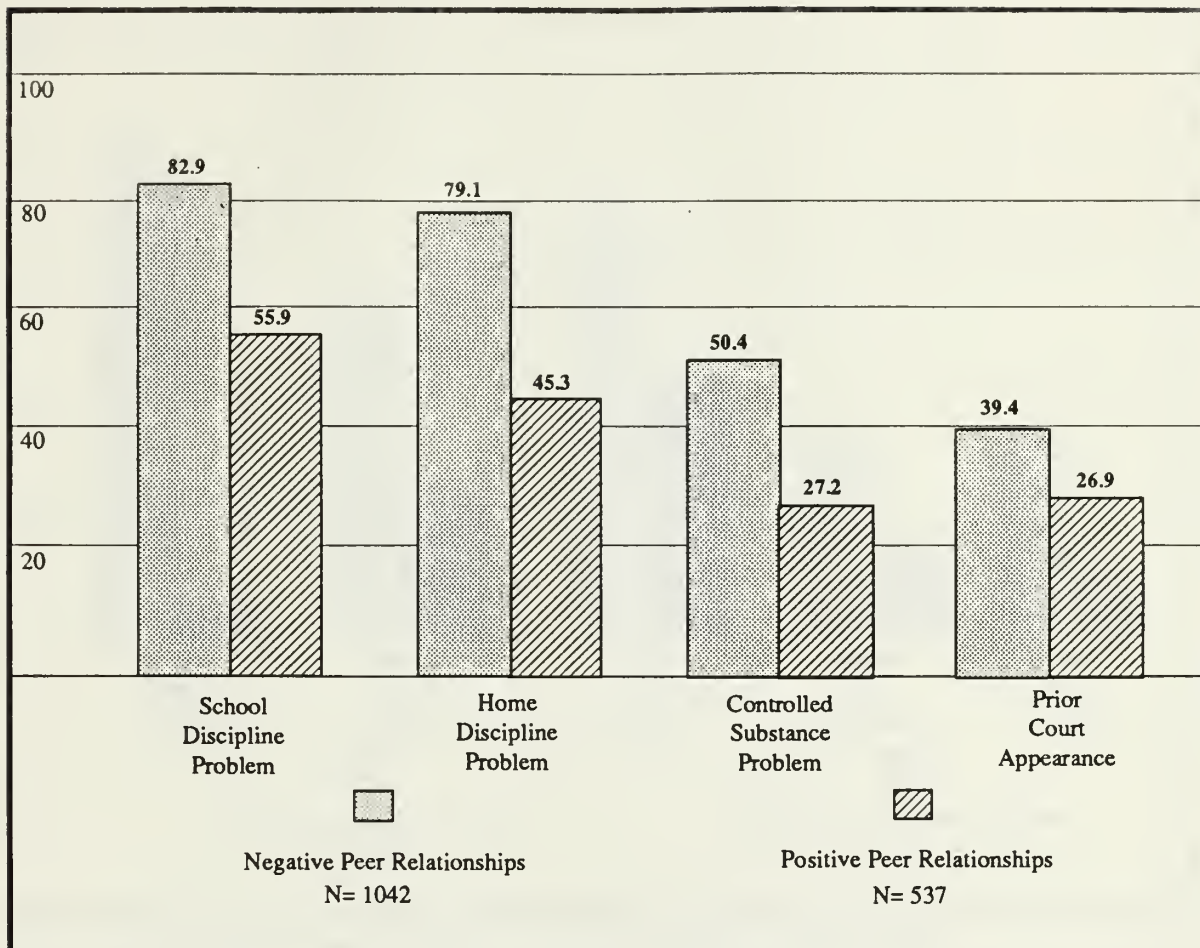


Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT. Those who live in homes which are characterized by conflict with their parent(s) not only have serious problems at home, but also at school. Family stress clearly impacts education. Almost 90% of those from stressful families have serious discipline problems at school. Worse, they are almost twice as likely to manifest low performance, underachievement, and school adjustment problems than those from less conflict ridden families.(cf. Figure 2 above).

It is not surprising that they are twice as likely to need alcohol and/or drug treatment. Extensive use and/or abuse of alcohol and drugs among juvenile offenders has frequently been linked to developmentally damaging home experiences (Dembo, 1987).

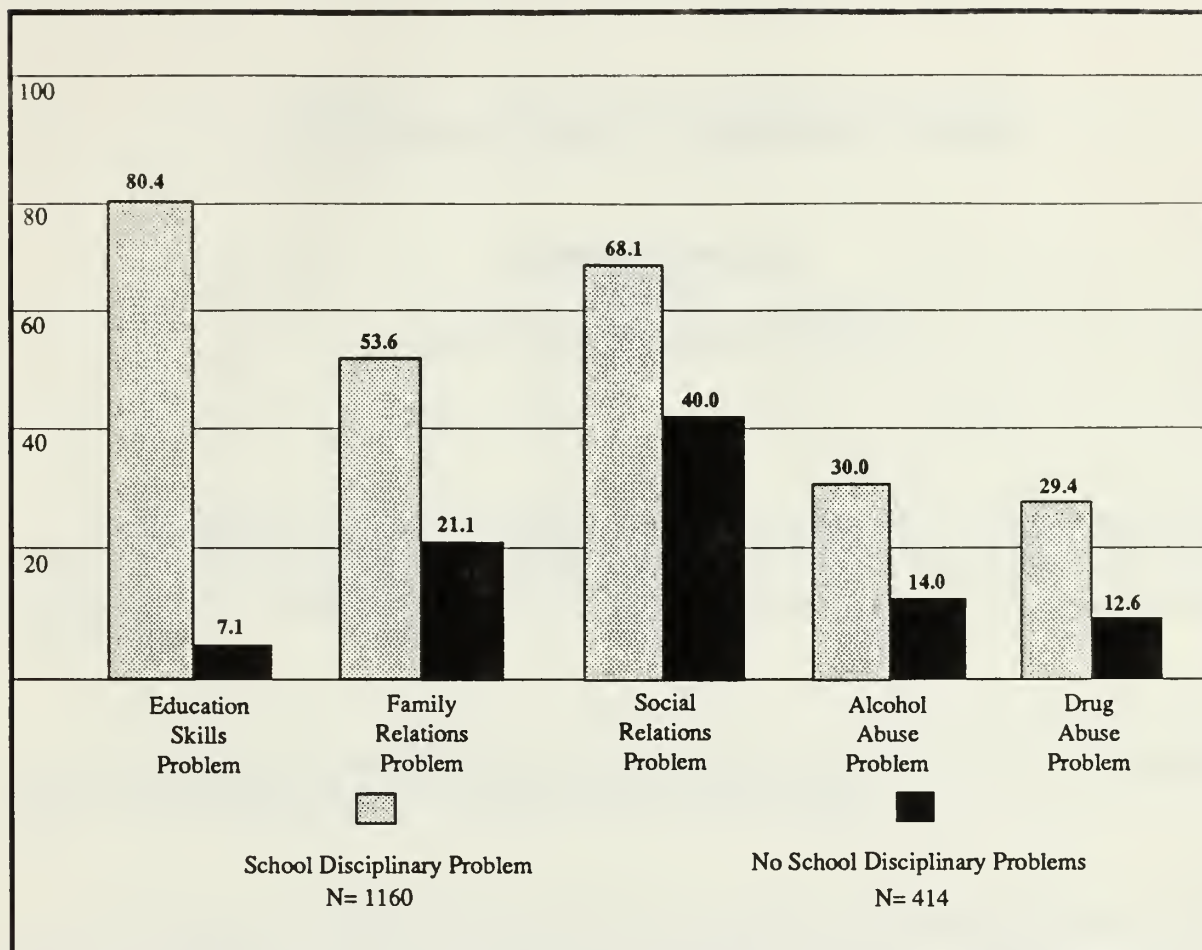
Figure 3: Impact of Negative Peer Relationships



Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

PEER PROBLEMS. As Figure 2 on page 11 indicates, more than 8-out-of-10 juveniles from conflict-ridden families also have negative peer relationships. Analyses indicate that family problems and peer problems go hand-in-hand. **It is not unusual for juveniles from stressful families to also have negative or no peer relationships.** Those who experience this broad pattern of non-supportive relationships end up being vulnerable on a number of dimensions, especially when compared to those who have positive peer support (cf. Figure 3 above). Such youth are more likely to be viewed as trouble makers, both in the home and at school. They are more likely to have a prior juvenile court appearance. They are almost twice as likely to have a substance abuse problem. As a result, they are considerably more likely to need substance abuse treatment, to be educationally deficient, to be socially isolated, and to be deficient in basic social skills. Their reputation as troublesome, together with their lack of basic social skills, only makes it more difficult for them to establish effective relationships which, in turn, may propel them to the use/abuse of controlled substances.

Figure 4: Impact of School Disciplinary Problems



Source: Research and Planning Department, Office of the Commissioner of Probation, Boston, MA, 1989.

PROBLEMS WITH/AT SCHOOL. Clearly, many of the juvenile offenders have problems with and/or at school. Such problems have consistently been identified as predictive of delinquent behavior (Grenier & Roundtree, 1987; Hawkins & Lishner, 1987). **Attendance at and involvement in school during the peak years of delinquent behavior may serve as a deterrent to such behavior** (Figueira-McDonough, 1987).

It appears that the difficulties these youth have with school are simply a reflection of the generally problematic nature of their lives. They are not only more likely to have been in trouble before as compared to those without school problems, but they are also more likely to have a substance abuse problem, and to have serious family and social relationship difficulties. As a result, 8-out-of-10 manifest educational deficiencies. They are twice as likely to need basic social skills that could facilitate improved family and social relationships. And they are almost three times as likely to need alcohol or drug treatment (cf. Figure 4 above).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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TARGETING YOUTH ON DRUGS. While the attention given to the problems of drug use among adult offenders has been growing and deserved, much less attention has been directed toward drug use among the youngest of our offenders, and the treatment and prevention strategies that might work with them.

This study documents an ominous trend among young drug users - they are moving in increasing numbers to the deadliest and most addictive of drugs, crack/cocaine.

The current educational models which have positively impacted adolescents by focusing on school-based interventions will not suffice with a population whose ties to school are tenuous at best. Nevertheless, the model of early preventive education regarding the dangers of drug use could work if sited at more practical locations for youthful offenders, locations such as courthouses and community centers.

Just as first offender drunk drivers are required to participate in an intensive educational program on alcohol abuse, similar programs can be designed for first offender juveniles who are at risk for becoming heavily involved with drugs. The outstanding cooperation given to the Massachusetts Probation Service from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health in the area of substance abuse services makes the development of such an approach feasible.

YOUNG OFFENDERS AND LETHAL FORCE. The streets of our major cities are accumulating stunning casualty lists - victims of all ages (many quite young) - of the deadly combination of drugs and violence.

This study documents a very worrisome trend. During the 1980's, and especially in the last two years, juvenile offenders have become increasingly involved in violent crime, and are more likely than ever in recent times to employ a weapon, including handguns. No longer is the use of lethal force

reserved to the older, more street-wise recidivist.

It is striking that many of the most serious assaults grow out of the most trivial disputes - arguments over hats and sneakers, for example. Young offenders are obviously not equipped to handle conflict in a way that will defuse or deescalate confrontation.

Pioneering work in violence prevention techniques by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, former Commissioner of Public Health in Massachusetts, can be readily applied to this problem. A number of probation departments are working toward implementing an experimental form of group supervision of young offenders convicted for crimes of impulsive violence. Probation Officer Steve Bocko and Dr. Bill Hudgins of the Cambridge Court have been running successful group programs for violent offenders for some years now. Following their lead, offenders on probation in the experimental courts will be taught, as part of their probation, alternative techniques and strategies for handling highly volatile, emotionally charged situations in a way that will decrease the potential for violence. This is a most promising avenue for research and experimentation.

MULTI-PROBLEM YOUTH AND SERVICE COORDINATION. This study alerts us to the reality that youth on probation, and particularly those with previous records, are experiencing problems on all fronts - family, school, and social problems. They are products of dysfunctional families whose ability to successfully interact with the several institutions and agencies with which they are involved is severely strained.

The concept of the probation officer as resource broker and case coordinator deserves to be further defined and bolstered. Someone must be involved with these families in coordinating interventions in a way that does not frustrate everyone involved and make meaningful participation impractical. Under this model, the probation officer can be conceptualized as the “Hub-of-the-wheel”, acting as liaison to school, family, and social service agencies, and managing the supervision plan so that services are provided in a convenient and orderly manner.

These multi-problem youth and their families will need the services of the probation officer in negotiating their way through the network of social services that could eventually be applied to their situation.

THE NEED FOR EARLY INTERVENTION. This study finds that a significant number of young offenders become known to the courts at an especially young age - 14 or younger. We also have learned that youngsters who begin their delinquent careers early persist in their troubles and have serious problems on all fronts before they enter adult court.

There can be a tendency to ignore the first offender - particularly at a “tender age”, making the assumption that labelling such a child could aggravate what might have been an isolated problem. It may

be time to make a different assumption. Perhaps by targeting those young people who first appear in court at an unusually young age, we can accomplish true prevention, so that these kids are not by age 16 virtually committed to a career of crime.

The early intervention model has worked with other social problems, most notably in the “Head Start” approach to remedying educational deficiencies. The Massachusetts Probation Service is currently experimenting in four juvenile departments with an early intervention model. By joining with court clinic personnel, in-depth evaluations of juveniles age 14 or younger who are adjudicated for a serious offense are being conducted. We hope to learn more about this special population, and whether more intensive supervision would be warranted. By reaching the youngest of our offenders early in their delinquent careers, these high-risk youth can perhaps be diverted from lengthy delinquent and adult criminal careers.

APPENDIX : METHODOLOGY

SAMPLES. This study focuses on 1,586 juvenile offenders placed on Risk/Need (R/N) probation supervision between January 1, 1989 and June 30, 1989, and for whom the Office of the Commissioner of Probation (OCP) received R/N forms.

DEFINITION OF JUVENILE. "In Massachusetts ... a person is considered a child up to the day before the 17th birthday. Therefore, in general, a person will be tried as a delinquent child for any offense committed during the 7 to 17 age span. In the event of apprehension and/or trial between a person's 17th and 18th birthdays, for an offense allegedly committed between ages 7 and 17, (s)he is treated as a juvenile. If a person is not brought before the court until after the 18th birthday for an offense committed before the 17th birthday, the court can, after a hearing, either discharge the matter or, if in the public interest, try the individual as an adult." (OCP, 1979)

PROBATION SUPERVISION. Probation supervision is "a process whereby probation office resources are allocated and utilized in accordance with a case management system and consistent with the order of the Court" (OCP, 1988). Probation supervision can take one of two forms -- either R/N supervision or administrative supervision.

R/N supervision is "exercised in all felony, misdemeanor, and delinquency cases in which supervision is ordered by the Court" (OCP, 1988). It addresses the needs of each individual offender, and assesses the level of risk the offender may pose to the community.

An "Assessment of Offender Risk/Need Form" is completed on each offender assigned to R/N probation supervision. This form, validated in 1980, was implemented on a statewide basis in 1982, and revalidated in a study released in 1984 (Brown & Cochran, 1984). Further revisions to the Risk/Need form were implemented in January 1989.

VARIABLES. The data on the R/N form can be classified into three distinctive sets of characteristics.

The first set of characteristics includes identifying features such as age at current offense, gender, court, date of assessment, probation officer, offense, supervision dates, and level of supervision.

The second set of characteristics includes information on the level of risk that the probationer may pose to the community, and include such variables as prior court appearance during the past five years, age at first offense, and alcohol/drug usage problems.

The third set of characteristics includes information on needs specific to the individual probationer which may influence their criminal behavior. These include such variables as educational level, employment status, and relationships.

DATA LIMITATIONS. The R/N information employed in this report is limited in two respects.

First, information is available only for offenders placed on R/N probation supervision and for whom OCP has received a R/N form. No information is available for offenders who were adjudicated delinquent but committed to another program.

Second, while studies conducted by OCP have consistently demonstrated the reliability of the risk-based information on the R/N form, the needs-based information appears to be less reliable, largely because of its subjective nature. However, criminal justice studies indicate that self-reported information is frequently as reliable as official records, and in some cases is more reliable (Bowker, 1978; Sampson, 1985).

ANALYSIS. For the purposes of this report, Chi-Square and t-tests were used to identify statistically significant differences.

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